

16. NEST OF THE PIED MYNA *STURNUS CONTRA* LINNAEUS

The true home of the Pied Myna is continental India, Assam and Manipur, whence it ranges into Burma, the Indochinese and the Malaysian subregions.

A favourite cage bird, the Pied Myna is usually available in Bombay's bird market, consignments being obtained from north India. Escapes of these cage birds have now established themselves in and around Bombay. In 1951 its breeding was recorded in the Bombay area of Dharavi by Humayun Abdulali (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 51: 736-7). Since then a number of nests have been recorded all over Greater Bombay, and the bird appears to

be extending its range northwards.

Normally the Pied Myna builds a globular nest composed of dry grass, hay and rags, placed in forks of tree trunks or branches. The nests are domeshaped over the egg chamber with a side entrance.

I recently, however, came across a nest in the Aarey Milk Colony at Goregaon, Bombay placed in an up-turned oblong glass shade of a street lamp. The bird entered and left the nest through the broken side of the lamp. The Pied Myna appears to be versatile, adapting itself to conditions obtaining in its new home.

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17. KALIVELI TANK AND YEDAYANTHITTU ESTUARY — A LITTLE KNOWN WETLAND HABITAT IN TAMIL NADU

Situated to the north of Pondicherry is the Kaliveli tank and its estuary. It runs along the coast towards Marakkanam and beyond where it enters the sea. The tank is an integral part of what is known as the kaliveli watershed. The watershed comprises about 400 sq. km. and is a selfcontained mini ecosystem. The area can be roughly divided into three habitats. One is the plateau, which is mainly dryland area. It has a system of tanks, ponds and ravines through which the run-off rainwater is being fed into the tank. The plateau has a maximum elevation of 55 m. Second is the tank proper and third the estuary. The tank is a non tidal seasonal fresh water habitat and comprises about 850 ha. The water

level fluctuates according to precipitation. The highest water level observed was about 2.1 m after a period of heavy rainfall. Mean water level is about 0.91 m. The tank empties into the sea through a narrow channel which connects the tank with the estuary. The estuary is a tidal salt water habitat with a saltpan complex. The area is about 567 ha.

Historic indications are that the area surrounding the tank was at one time heavily forested, even as recent as 25 years ago. Recently, in a village close to the tank, a stone slab was discovered with inscriptions. One of the inscriptions deciphered tells how a king was hunting elephants in the surrounding forest. Archeologists dated the stone as from

the 18th century. This is indicative of the wildlife that once must have existed in the Kaliveli area. Old people in the villages sometimes tell you that many years ago they were employed to help clear large tracts of forest. At two locations one can still find the remnants of the ancient forest. A few acres is all that is left. It is therefore assumed that the tank must have been once covered with water the year round. Now, in years of scant rainfall, the tank is dry for a few months. By the outlet to the sea there are low sand dunes. A few straggly mangroves are all that remain of what once must have been a large mangrove forest.

Indications are that the tank plays an important role in the migratory habits of many bird species as it lies on the same migratory trail as Point Calimere. During the migratory season there are usually about 40,000 birds of different species present in the tank and about 20,000 in the estuary. Although the number of species present during this period remains roughly the same, the numbers present within the species do fluctuate. It is assumed that there is a fair amount of movement of various species between the tank and the tanks and ponds on the plateau. It is also assumed that there is a continuous movement of various species between Point Calimere, Vedanthangal and the Kaliveli tank. On the plateau one often sees great flocks of birds passing over, generally wetland birds, going either north-south or south-north. In March 1984 a survey took place for 5 days. More than 120 species were observed (see appendix). The following points were of particular interest:

1. There was a large concentration of dabbling ducks, numbering at least 10,000 birds. Four species were recorded all in large numbers: Garganey, Wigeon, Shoveller and Pintail.
2. A flock of 36 Ruddy Shelduck was seen feeding in the estuary. This species is rare

or absent in the south. (Ali, S. & Ripley, S. D. 1981)

3. Both Greater and Lesser Flamingos were recorded. The Lesser Flamingos status is uncertain. (Ali, S. & Ripley, S. D. 1981) 5 were observed in the estuary. The pattern observed for the Greater Flamingo is a gradual increase in numbers. Usually the first birds arrive during the end of November and the beginning of December. A flock of about 300 is normal for this time. It increases to about 3000 to 4000 birds during March-April after which the birds disperse for the return journey to their breeding grounds. On May 15th 1985, 5 birds were still found in the tank which is unusual.
4. There is a major tern roost in the estuary. Observed at one time 10,000 Whiskered Tern, 400+ Gullbilled Tern and very few Caspian, Large Crested and Little Tern.
5. One morning a flock of 35 Spotbilled Pelicans was observed feeding in the middle of the estuary. That same evening a flock of 41 was observed sitting on the bunds of the saltpan complex. In June 1984 a flock of 54 birds was seen in the tank although there was little or no water. In November 1984 about 70 were observed in the tank. In January 1985 a solitary bird was seen and in February 1985 a flock of about a hundred were observed in the tank. Spotbilled Pelican is thought to be an endangered species by some authorities. (Neelakantan, K. K. 1980).
6. One pair of White-Bellied Sea Eagles was observed attending a large eyrie in the estuary. The eyrie was very large and presumed to be at least several years old.

For some species a presence of a few thousand is not uncommon. Others are represented only by small numbers. Of the birds

observed during March 1984, 43 were migrants, 6 species of which the status is unknown and 14 species which are considered rare in the south. (Ali, S. & Ripley, S. D. 1981, 1969, 1969).

The coast is visited by many birds during the migratory season, many of whom roost in the tank or estuary during the night. The early morning sees many such birds flying and feeding along the coast. At certain places along the coast turtles (pres. Ridley) come to the beach to lay their eggs. The only evidence of this we have so far are turtle eggs offered for sale by the local population. Regarding the marine life in the tank and estuary little is known to date. The local population catch fresh water prawns, mainly for their own consumption. Once a Little Tern was observed catching a small fish. The French Institute in Pondicherry has some information on the flora of the tank and its surrounding area.

The health and potential improvement of this unique eco-system depends to a large extent on the health of the watershed. The tank is one of the last unpolluted estuaries on the east coast of India although it is suspected that because of the use of agricultural pesticides on the plateau the tank is slowly being polluted. Possible threats to this eco-system is

the planned industrialization of an enclave of Pondicherry State in Tamil Nadu. Already a caustic soda factory is in operation releasing its affluent into a ravine. The environmental damage this causes has as yet to be ascertained. This area is one of few such eco-systems on the sub-continent and its destruction would be a serious loss. It is therefore recommended that the entire Kaliveli watershed area should be declared as a bird sanctuary and effectively protected. The Centenary seminar of the B.N.H.S. requested that high priority should be given to the identification and listing of all significant wetland habitats and the setting up of wetland nature reserves. (Resolution 4, no. 7). It is my opinion that the Kaliveli watershed area is such a habitat and is in need of full protection.

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PIETER

CENTRE FIELD,
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MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

APPENDIX

List of bird species observed at Kaliveli tank and Yedayanthittu estuary. November 1983 till July 1985

1. Spottedbilled Pelican, *Pelecanus philippensis*.
2. Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*.
3. Paddybird, *Ardeola grayii*.
4. Large Egret, *Ardea alba*.
5. Median Egret, *Egretta intermedia*.
6. Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*.
7. Indian Reef Heron, *Egretta gularis*.
8. Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*.
9. Painted Stork, *Mycteria leucocephala*.
10. Openbill Stork, *Anastomus oscitans*.
11. Whitenecked Stork, *Ciconia episcopus*.
12. White Stork, *Ciconia ciconia*.
13. Blacknecked Stork, *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*.
14. White Ibis, *Threskiornis aethiopia*.
15. Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*.
16. Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*.
17. Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus*.
18. Lesser Flamingo, *Phoeniconaias minor*.
19. Barheaded Goose, *Anser indicus*.
20. Ruddy Shelduck, *Tadorna ferruginea*.
21. Pintail, *Anas acuta*.
22. Wigeon, *Anas penelope*.
23. Garganey, *Anas querquedula*.
24. Shoveller, *Anas clypeata*.
25. Pariah Kite, *Milvus migrans*.
26. Brahminy Kite, *Haliastur indus*.
27. Shikra, *Accipiter badius*.
28. Booted Hawk-Eagle, *Hieraaetus pennatus*.
29. Whitebellied Sea-Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucogaster*.
30. White Scavenger Vulture, *Neophron percnopterus*.
31. Pale Harrier, *Circus macrourus*.
32. Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*.
33. Pied Harrier, *Circus melanoleucos*.
34. Marsh Harrier, *Circus aeruginosus*.
35. Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*.
36. Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*.
37. Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*.
38. Grey Partridge, *Francolinus pondicerianus*.
39. Blackwinged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*.
40. Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*.
41. Stone Curlew, *Burhinus oedipnemos*.
42. Indian Courser, *Cursorius coromandelicus*.
43. Redwattled Lapwing, *Vanellus indicus*.
44. Grey Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*.
45. Eastern Golden Plover, *Pluvialis dominica*.
46. Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius*.
47. Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*.
48. Lesser Sand Plover, *Charadrius mongolus*.
49. Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*.
50. Curlew, *Numenius arquata*.
51. Blacktailed Godwit, *Limosa limosa*.
52. Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus*.
53. Redshank, *Tringa totanus*.
54. Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatilis*.
55. Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*.
56. Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ochropus*.
57. Wood Sandpiper, *Tringa glareola*.
58. Terek Sandpiper, *Tringa terek*.
59. Common Sandpiper, *Tringa erythroleucos*.
60. Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*.
61. Pintail Snipe, *Gallinago stenura*.
62. Fantail Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*.
63. Little Stint, *Calidris minuta*.
64. Temminck's Stint, *Calidris temminckii*.
65. Longtoed Stint, *Calidris subminuta*.
66. Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*.
67. Curlew Sandpiper, *Calidris testacea*.
68. Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax*.
69. Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*.
70. Great Blackheaded Gull, *Larus ichthyaeus*.
71. Brownheaded Gull, *Larus brunnicephalus*.
72. Blackheaded Gull, *Larus ridibundus*.
73. Whiskered Tern, *Chlidonias hybrida*.
74. Whitewinged Black Tern, *Chlidonias leucop-terus*.
75. Gullbilled Tern, *Gelochelidon nilotica*.
76. Caspian Tern, *Hydroprogne caspia*.
77. Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*.
78. Little Tern, *Sterna albifrons*.
79. Large Crested Tern, *Sterna bergii*.
80. Blue Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia*.
81. Spotted Dove, *Streptopelia chinensis*.
82. Roseringed Parakeet, *Psittacula krameri*.
83. Common Hawk-Cuckoo, *Cuculus varius*.
84. Spotted Owlet, *Athene brama*.
85. Palm Swift, *Cypsiurus parvus*.
86. Pied Kingfisher, *Ceryle rudis*.

87. Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*.
88. Whitebreasted Kingfisher, *Halcyon smyrnensis*.
89. Bluetailed Bee-Eater, *Merops philippinus*.
90. Green Bee-Eater, *Merops orientalis*.
91. Indian Roller, *Coracias benghalensis*.
92. Crimsonbreasted Barbet, *Megalaima haemacephala*.
93. Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*.
94. Goldenbacked Woodpecker, *Dinopium benghalense*.
95. Redwinged Bush Lark, *Mirafra erythroptera*.
96. Ashycrowned Finch-Lark, *Eremopterix grisea*.
97. Rufoutailed Finch-Lark, *Ammomanes phoenicurus*.
98. Eastern Skylark, *Alauda gulgula*.
99. Collared Sand Martin, *Riparia riparia*.
100. Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*.
101. Black Drongo, *Dicrurus adsimilis*.
102. Common Myna, *Acridotheres tristis*.
103. Brahminy Myna, *Sturnus pagodarum*.
104. Indian Tree Pie, *Dendrocitta vagabunda*.
105. House Crow, *Corvus splendens*.
106. Jungle Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos*.
107. Common Wood Shrike, *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*.
108. Common Iora, *Aegithina tiphia*.
109. Redvented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus cafer*.
110. Whiteheaded Babbler, *Turdoides affinis*.
111. Tailor Bird, *Orthotomus sutorius*.
112. Green Warbler, *Phylloscopus nitidus*.
113. Magpie Robin, *Copsychus saularis*.
114. Indian Robin, *Saxicoloides fulicata*.
115. Paddyfield Pipit, *Anthus novaeseelandiae*.
116. Richard's Pipit, *Anthus n. richardi*.
117. Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla flava*.
118. Pied Wagtail, *Motacilla maderaspatensis*.
119. Purplerumped Sunbird, *Nectarinia zeylonica*.
120. Loten's Sunbird, *Nectarinia lotenia*.
121. Purple Sunbird, *Nectarinia asiatica*.
122. House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*.
123. Yellowthroated Sparrow, *Petronia xanthocollis*.
124. Baya Weaver Bird, *Ploceus philippinus*.
125. Whitethroated Munia, *Lonchura malabarica*.

18. THE REDFRONTED BABBLER *STACHYRIS RUFIFRONS* AND REDHEADED BABBLER *S. RUFICEPS* IN NORTHERN THAILAND

INTRODUCTION

In south-east Asia there is a pair of very similar species of rufouscapped babblers of the genus *Stachyris* which nevertheless have diagnostic characters (Harrison 1985). The more northerly species, the Redheaded Babbler *S. ruficeps*, has a uniform chestnut cap extending back to the nape and merging with the mantle. The pale throat merges into the paler parts of the ochraceous-buff bordered upper breast. The more southerly Redfronted Babbler *S. rufifrons* has a chestnut cap extending back no further than the hind-crown and showing indistinct dark streaking along the feather shafts. The pale throat is separated from the rest of the underside by a more distinct zone of slightly rufous buff on the upper breast.

S. ruficeps occurs from the Yangtze Valley

southwards in China to Yunnan and the northern parts of Vietnam and Laos. Westwards it occurs through the Himalayas to Sikkim and into north-eastern and north-western Burma. It has an isolate population in southern Vietnam.

S. rufifrons occurs in the Himalayas from Nepal eastwards into Assam, north-eastern and southern Burma, northern Laos and Vietnam, and into Malaya, Sumatra and Burma. It has an isolate population in southern Laos.

The two species appear to overlap in range in areas from northern Laos to Sikkim. There seems to be an altitudinal difference in breeding range, following the general rule with the higher latitude species *S. ruficeps* breeding at higher altitudes where they overlap. Baker (1922) writing of their range in India and Burma, stated that *ruficeps* bred from upwards